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ABSTRACT

Over the years, Neumann College (Pennsylvania) and surrounding school districts have cooperated informally in providing clinical sites for student teaching experiences. The growth of education programs at Neumann prompted a formalization of the clinical experience process in order to maintain the quality of its teacher preparation programs. The division of education took the lead in creating a collaborative partnership by evaluating prototypes from the corporate world. In the summer of 1990, it invited one elementary school to commence in a pilot partnership designed to link theory and research with practical experience. Majors in elementary or early childhood education would go to field placements in the second semester of their freshman year, and classroom teachers at the school would be supplied with resources from the college to enhance individualization of classroom instruction. Authority and responsibility were shared equally by school and college faculty. Evaluation of the program consisted of assessing logs compiled by students, analyzing taped lessons, and examining student scores. Prospective teachers completed self-evaluations, and their classroom performance was appraised. Results indicated success in all areas. Participants concluded that considerable improvement in pupil progress related to the individualization afforded by the partnership program. Partnership schools appreciated the availability of continuing professional development. Preliminary findings indicate the partnership benefits all constituencies engaged in the process, and its benefits outweigh its limitations. (SM)

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PARTNERS IN LEARNING: THE DIVISION OF EDUCATION AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CONNECTION

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PARTNERS IN LEARNING: THE DIVISION OF EDUCATION AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CONNECTION

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Neumann College, a small, Catholic, Liberal Arts college in the Franciscan tradition, located in Southeastern Pennsylvania, is home to a thriving Division of Education. Enrolled within the Division of Education are some one hundred of Neumann's approximately eight hundred full-time students, pursuing degrees and certification in Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education. Clustered around the College are several Catholic grade schools and the Chichester School District; three of the Catholic schools, Notre Dame de Lourdes, Saint Francis de Sales, and Saint Joseph, and one public elementary school, Boothwyn, are in particularly close proximity. Over the years, Neumann and the surrounding schools have cooperated informally in providing clinical sites for student teaching experiences, but the growth of education programs at Neumann has prompted Division of Education faculty members to recognize that expansion and formalization of the clinical experience process would be necessary in order to maintain the quality of its teacher preparation programs.

Formalizing the clinical experience process represented the response of the Division of Education to the demand for structuring the preservice activities of

Education majors; formalization afforded students, faculty, and classroom teachers the opportunity to prepare a series of clinical experiences with continuity. Of equal importance to the need for establishing continuity in preservice experiences was the recognition by Division members of the mandates promulgated by The Holmes Group (1986) and the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986). Asserted within these studies of national scope was the call for increased collaboration between institutions of higher education and institutions of basic education (Badiali, Hillkirk, and Nolan, 1991). The Division heard the call and saw the need to design a collaborative system that would benefit both constituencies. The Division took its lead in creating a partnership by evaluating the prototypes that had emerged from the corporate world, and one of the more useful examples depicted the effectiveness of experiential learning in the language arts (Cetron, 1985). A number of models in partnership programs highlighted in Distinguished Company (1991) provided additional material for creating the Neumann College design as well.

In the Summer of 1990, the Division of Education invited Saint Francis de Sales School to commence in a pilot partnership. Designed to link theory and research with practical experience, the joint venture would offer the following returns: Majors in Early Childhood or Elementary Education would be accessed to field placements as early as the second semester of their freshperson year, and classroom teachers at Saint Francis would be supplied with resources from the College to enhance the individualization of classroom instruction. As in the Northern Arizona University partnership, authority and responsibility in program development are shared equally

by school and college faculty alike (VerVelde, Horn, and Steinshouer, 1991). The partnership was proposed to Saint Francis teachers as an opportunity for them to become real participants in the act of teacher empowerment by modeling their abilities before preservice education majors (Wolfe, Schewel, and Bickham, 1989). As Fischetti, Maloy, and Heffley (1989) observed, the tutorial and small group instruction approach to preservice clinical experiences offered education majors and classroom teachers a manageable format for modeling, practicing, and evaluating the progress of Neumann students. Likewise, it facilitated the enhancement of pupil induvidualization that had been proposed to Saint Francis School as a major benefit in participating in the partnership. Hence, the pilot program initially incorporated the content of just a single methods course, Developmental Reading, in the partnership, and during the Fall, 1990 semester, students who enrolled in the course were assigned six to eight hours of tutorial and small group instruction at Saint Francis.

Success of the pilot program was evaluated in December, 1990. Education faculty members, cooperating teachers, and the school principal assessed logs compiled by the Developmental Reading students; individual lessons were taped and analyzed; Saint Francis student test scores were examined. Anecdotal feedback from Saint Francis teachers regarding the performance of their pupils suggested that in general there was sustained on-task behavior. Furthermore, the participation of Neumann College students in the classrooms facilitated the extension of mastery and enrichment activities. Saint Francis teachers attributed improvements in time-on-task and mastery learning directly to the presence of Neumann students and their

placement in anticipation of their experiences working with elementary school children. The objectives were collected, then analyzed by Division of Education faculty members, and finally aggregated to represent the concensus of the Neumann students. Ten outcomes were generated from the aggregate of some 300 objectives and would be assessed by preservice participants at the conclusion of the semester according to a four point agreement scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The ten outcomes to be assessed were:

1. Recognize and work with students on a variety of skill levels.
2. Examine and use a variety of effective techniques for teaching reading.
3. Enjoy the experience of working with elementary children in reading.
4. Be able to identify reading difficulties and to provide appropriate remediation.
5. Develop a positive relationship with elementary school children.
6. Apply the information learned in methods courses to the elementary classroom.
7. Stress important concepts and evaluate student comprehension.
8. Write an effective lesson plan.
9. Increase self-confidence when planning for tutorial or small group instruction.
10. Develop positive classroom management techniques.

Preliminary results of the evaluation reflected positively upon the effectiveness of the partnership, and a broader-based, more extensive enterprise was off and running. Based on the perceptions of those involved in evaluating the pilot program, a decision to enlarge the scope of the partnership was made. The first stage of the enlargement encompassed the introduction of additional methods courses in Language Arts, Children's Literature, and Elementary School Mathematics to the Saint Francis environment. The impact of these courses upon individualization of instruction and student achievement was formatively assessed using the same measures that were employed in the pilot stage of the partnership, and findings once again

suggested continuation. Teacher-made criterion-referenced tests were administered to second, third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms in language arts and mathematics. Results of the tests indicated that more pupils achieved eighty percent mastery levels in these two areas with fewer trials during the partnership than did similar numbers of pupils in years prior to the partnership. Participants concluded that much of the improvement in pupil progress was attributable to the individualization afforded by the partnership program.

Continuation, however, implied expansion; additional clinical resources would be necessary and desirable. Because informal relationships in student teacher supervision already existed with Notre Dame de Lourdes and Saint Joseph, these two schools were invited to participate. Structuring this expanded stage of the partnership required the deployment of students and faculty in a way that all three schools would share equally in the academic resources offered by the Division of Education without exhausting any of the clinical resources made available by the grade schools. Hence, Saint Francis and Saint Joseph Schools became locations for the implementation of specific methodology classes in reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, and Notre Dame de Lourdes became the site for student teacher supervision. In a spirit of collegiality, the Division of Education extended invitations to all of the partnership program teachers to avail themselves, free of charge, of the continuing professional development workshops for educators that are sponsored by Neumann College. During the 1991-1992 academic year, for instance, partnership teachers may participate in four workshops encompassing such topics as testing,

availability for tutoring and instructing small groups. Neumann students themselves were appraised for their performance in the classroom according to qualitative criteria. Cooperating teachers were asked to appraise the performance of their preservice partners by rating twenty criteria as outstanding, good, satisfactory, or in need of improvement (Yoder, 1991). As the ratings imply, the intent of the performance appraisal was to accentuate positive behaviors and to identify, but not to punish, behaviors that required modification. The twenty criteria included:

knowledge of the subject
completeness of written lesson plans
presentation of activity
skill in questioning
use of instructional materials
class awareness
variety in instructional techniques
evaluation of student progress
flexibility in working with learners of varying abilities
ability to identify learning difficulties
knowlege of sources of remediation
positive rapport
cooperation and implementation of feedback with cooperation teacher
dependability
professionalism
enthusiasm/motivation
growth in self-confidence
voice projection and tone
grammar
personal appearance and poise

Neumann students were also asked to engage in a self-evaluation of their preservice performance. The process of self-evaluation began with the setting of objectives by the students themselves. At the start of the semester, students were assigned to prepare ten objectives in which they would participate in the preservice

creativity, mathematics manipulatives, and whole language. The cost to a non-participating classroom teacher for attending all four of the workshops would approach nearly three hundred dollars.

Preliminary findings suggest that the Neumann College Partnership in Learning benefits all constituencies engaged in the process. Education majors at the College become acquainted with the classroom environment early and often in their careers; they are immersed in an environment that encourages them to synthesize their knowledge of current practices and to implement new instructional strategies. Grade school teachers recognize a direct linkage to and sense of purpose with a higher education teacher education program; they share in a collegial relationship with Division of Education counterparts and participate in the continuing professional development workshop series sponsored by the College; they derive empowerment through their mentoring relationship with preservice Education majors. Students in the partnership schools receive the attention of all three of the professional participants in the program, namely, the Education majors, the Division of Education faculty members, and the classroom instructor.

What are the weaknesses thus far? Protocols, placements, and flexibility top the list. Feedback from building principals has implied that some of the Neumann students neglect to check in with the administration and sometimes expect the classroom teacher to rearrange schedules without advanced notice. Placements of preservice Education majors often slows down when the process must channel through as many as four layers of administrative bureaucracy. Cooperating teachers

selected through this administrative mechanism may be less than willing participants. Procedures for placing and selecting need to be refined. Nevertheless, the partnership benefits generally outweigh its weaknesses. Partnership schools have expressed their satisfaction with the program, particularly in terms of the pupil performance in grades two through five and the availability of continuing professional development opportunities. Neumann preservice Education majors have reported their satisfaction with the program, especially in terms of the opportunity for immediately applying theory to practice. Many students have voiced a common impression: Frustration sets in when all that is offered is theory; Partners in Learning permits them to get out and do it!

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